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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
2 June 1981

Justice probes Air Force spy case

By JOSEPH VOLZ

Washington—(News Bureau)—The Justice Department launched its own investigation yesterday into allegations that Air Force 2d Lt. Christopher Cooke, who is being held by military authorities, turned over top-secret material on Titan intercontinental missiles to Soviet diplomats here.

Until yesterday, Justice officials were saying that they had no evidence indicating that Cooke, 25, who was deputy commander of a Titan launch site at McConnell (Kan.) Air Force Base, had given the Russians any secrets in three visits to the Soviet Embassy within the last year.

Sources close to the investigation say that the Air Force since has changed some codes used in giving the signal to launch Strategic Air Command missiles aimed at the Soviet Union.

These sources said also that a high-level decision at the Justice Department and the Pentagon was made to bring the Justice Department's Criminal Division into the investigation. Air Force officials have charged Cooke only with violating military regulations by making the three visits to the embassy without notifying superiors.

THE DAILY NEWS also learned that investigators believe Cooke appeared to be playing some kind of a double-agent game by contacting the Central Intelligence Agency at the same time that he was visiting the Soviet Embassy, which is located a few blocks from the White House.

Cooke reportedly was observed by FBI agents when he entered the embassy. The agents regularly take photographs of everyone who enters the building but they apparently had trouble identifying Cooke at first.

At the same time, he was making a

third attempt to join the CIA early this year by phoning a recruiter, it was reported. CIA officials say the applications were never checked out—he had applied in 1978 and 1979, too, and no background check was made.

Cooke, a graduate of Old Dominion University in Virginia who had a master's degree from the College of William and Mary, joined the Air Force in December 1979.

AIR FORCE investigators did make a thorough background investigation of him as is customary for officers in the Strategic Air Command but found nothing to disqualify him from joining the missile force.

Investigators believe Cooke may have tipped off the Soviets to some of the targets that his Titan missile unit was aimed at. But it is unlikely that Cooke knew the entire closely guarded "strategic integrated operating plan (SIOP)." The plan lists Soviet targets

for each of the 52 Titans and 1,000 Minuteman missiles as well as the fleet of B-52 bombers and Poseidon submarines.

Meanwhile, Cooke's mother, Mrs. Richard B. Cooke of Richmond, Va., was given special permission to visit her son yesterday at McConnell, where he has been held since May 22. Mrs. Cooke told reporters in Wichita, Kan., that her son complained about being held in "maximum confinement." He said: "There's no reason for my isolation in this manner."

COOKE'S AIR FORCE attorney, Capt. Francis Pedrotty, said he has a written agreement between Cooke and the Air Force promising the lieutenant immunity from prosecution if he cooperates fully. But Air Force officials said that any such agreement is void because Cooke has not cooperated.